

Child and Family Services Update

May 30, 2003

Practice Guidelines And New Rules Replace Child And Family Services Policy

By Adam Trupp

On April 29, 2003 the policy manual for Child and Family Services was replaced by something new. As you probably already know, the new document is entitled Practice Guidelines and is available at http://www.hsdcs.utah.gov/practice_guidelines.htm. **(Please -- bookmark this page once you are there!)** These guidelines include the changes to policy that have been underway for more than two years. That means there is new material in the guidelines as well as a new format.

I know many of you have been waiting for new policy to be published for some time, and you may wonder why the change in the name and what it means. Some background information might be useful. The work of rewriting division policy was originally undertaken as a partnership between the Child and Family Services Board and our division. It was intended to make the policies we rely on to assist us to do our work supportive of and consistent with the principles and goals that guide our work. As we were nearing completion of that project, a change in the law created a need to change the structure of division policies. The change to statute made it necessary for us to create more “administrative rules” and to rename what has until now been called policy.

The bottom line on all this is simple. We have now, as we have always had, a number of items that impose expectations on our work. These include statutes and administrative rules (which set legal requirements), the Milestone Plan and Case Process Reviews (which set process requirements), and Practice Guidelines (or policy) (which set practice objectives and procedural requirements). Consequently, the structure of things is not much different. What is different, or at least intended to be, is the nature of the Practice Guidelines—the Child and Family Services internal policies.

As we worked through the process of rewriting policy it became clear that what was needed were guidelines for practice that included some requirements and some procedures. It also became clear, however, that for the most part, the new document should assist staff in applying the Practice Model and in completing their work. It should not simply provide a list of tasks that must be performed or expectations that must be met.

As a result, when you review the Practice Guidelines you will see that each guideline starts with an objective for practice. This objective should be kept in mind whenever performing the tasks or providing the service that is referred to. While the guidelines do include directives and expectations, those should be applied or performed with recognition of the general objectives identified and the Practice Model Principles. If you find that the procedures or guidelines in the document do not support, or even

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conflict with, good practice please let me know. We will continue to make changes to these guidelines and we will continue to need input from people in the field on whether we have gotten them right. Please feel free to send comments to me or to contact a state specialist with your comments, questions, or concerns.

One final point: Many of the guidelines also contain a reference to law or administrative rule. Statutes and rules, of course, provide requirements not just guidelines. It is important to remember that while the Practice Guidelines are intended to support the Practice Model, they should also help us to meet our responsibilities under the law. If you find during your work that a guideline or procedure is in conflict with or directly contradicts the law, please let a state specialist or me know.

We hope the new format is easy to read and easy to use. While the current version on the Internet will undergo some additional changes over the next few weeks, it is currently available on the website. The document posted may be searched and is indexed. Please take a look at the new guidelines and the rules that are posted with them and send me feedback. I will be in the region offices over the next two months to provide more information and to answer questions. Feel free to send questions any time.